

Day Hikes

The Needles District offers over 60 miles of interconnecting trails as challenging as they are rewarding. Many different routes are possible, but some of the more common ones are described below. Conditions are primitive. Most trails traverse a mixture of slickrock benches and sandy washes. Longer trails are especially rough and require negotiating steep, rocky passes with drop-offs, narrow areas, and/or ladders. Water in the backcountry is unreliable and frequently scarce. Trails are marked with cairns (small rock piles) and signs at intersections. Pets are not allowed on trails.

Elephant Hill Trailhead

Chesler Park Viewpoint (6mi/10km, 3-4 hrs round trip)
This popular trail leads across varied terrain to a pass overlooking a scenic expanse of desert grasses and shrubs surrounded by sandstone spires.

Chesler Park Loop / Joint Trail (11 mi/18km, 5+ hrs round trip)
This loop involves hiking beyond the viewpoint described above. Great views of the Needles formations. The loop around Chesler winds through a series of deep, narrow fractures called the Joint Trail, and travels briefly along a four-wheel-drive road.

Druid Arch (11 mi/18km, 5-7 hrs round trip)
This trail offers one of the most spectacular views in the Needles. It follows the Chesler Park access trail to Elephant Canyon, then travels along the canyon bottom across a mixture of deep sand and loose rock all the way to its upper end. The last .25 mile is a steep climb involving one ladder and some scrambling.

Big Spring Canyon Overlook Trailhead

Confluence Overlook (11 mi/18km, 4-6 hrs round trip)
Unlike other hikes in the district, this trail traverses mostly dry, open country along the northern edge of the geologic faults that shaped the Needles. Trail ends at a cliff overlooking the junction of the Green and Colorado rivers 1,000 feet below.

Squaw Flat Loop “A” Trailhead

Big Spring - Squaw (7.5 mi/12km, 3-4 hrs round trip)
A great introduction to the landscape of the Needles, connecting two canyons for a loop across varied terrain. The route between the canyons climbs steep grades that are dangerous when wet and may make people with a fear of heights uncomfortable.

Big Spring - Elephant (10.8 mi/17km, 4-6 hrs round trip)
This loop features extended hiking on slickrock benches and mesa tops overlooking canyons. Excellent views of sheer cliff walls and other rock formations. Two ladders must be climbed in the pass between the canyons.



Squaw - Lost (8.7 mi/14km, 4-6 hrs round trip)
Another wonderful loop hike with some difficult sections climbing between the two canyons. Riparian areas in both canyons attract birds and other wildlife. Route in Lost Canyon passes through dense vegetation and may be very wet. One ladder must be climbed.



Peekaboo (10 mi/16.5km, 5-6 hrs round trip)
Trail crosses both Squaw and Lost canyons on its way to Salt Creek Canyon, passing along high slickrock benches with spectacular views. Steep slopes and nearby cliff edges make this a challenging route. Two ladders must be climbed. Prehistoric rock art panel may be seen at the end of the trail near Peekaboo camp.


Short Hikes <i>Distances and times are round trip. Trail guides available at trailheads and at the visitor center.</i>			
Roadside Ruin	. 3 mi./5 km	20 minutes	Easy trail. Leads to an ancestral Puebloan granary.
Cave Spring	. 6 mi/1 km	45 minutes	Two ladders. Leads to a historic cowboy camp and prehistoric pictographs.
Pothole Point	. 6 mi/1 km	45 minutes	Uneven slickrock surface. Leads to pothole communities and views of the Needles.
Slickrock Trail	2.4 mi/4 km	2-3 hours	Uneven slickrock surface. Several viewpoints and sometimes bighorn sheep.


Four-Wheel-Drive Roads

Over 50 miles of challenging backcountry roads access campsites, trailheads, and park attractions. All vehicles and bikes must remain on designated roads. All of these roads require high-clearance, four-wheel-drive vehicles. Inexperienced drivers are discouraged from attempting these roads as the risk of vehicle damage is great and towing expenses typically exceed \$1,000.

Elephant Hill  
One of the most technical four-wheel-drive roads in Utah, Elephant Hill presents drivers with steep grades, loose rock, stair-step drops, tight turns and backing. Over the hill, equally challenging roads lead to various campsites and trailheads, as well as to BLM lands south of the park. Challenging mountain biking.

Colorado Overlook  
Moderate road, good for mountain bikes. There are large rocks and stair-step drops in the last 1.5 miles which visitors may avoid by parking on the road (leave room for others!) and walking to the overlook. Outstanding views of the Colorado River Canyon. Unprotected overlook; use caution. No vehicle camping.

Horse Canyon / Peekaboo 
Permit required for day and overnight use. Roads travel along canyon bottoms where deep sand, deep water and quicksand are common. Too sandy for mountain bikes. At Peekaboo, vehicle campsites are available and prehistoric rock art may be seen. Horse Canyon road leads to several arches and Tower Ruin.

Lavender Canyon 
Permit required for day use. Road follows a canyon bottom where deep sand, deep water and quicksand are common. Too sandy for mountain bikes. There are two major creek crossings with steep banks. Many arches and ancestral Puebloan granaries may be viewed from the road. No vehicle camping inside the park.



Protect Your Park

- Pets are not allowed on hiking trails or on four-wheel-drive roads, even in a vehicle.
- Do not enter, alter, damage or deface archaeological sites. Do not collect artifacts.
- All vehicles and bicycles must stay on designated roads.
- ATVs are not permitted.
- Protect cryptobiotic soil crusts by staying on trails.
- Permits are required for all overnight backcountry trips.



Protect Yourself

- Drink at least one gallon of water each day.
- Always carry a topo map, adequate clothing, and a flashlight.
- Remain in one place if you become lost or separated.
- Flash floods can occur without warning. Never cross a canyon that is flooding.
- During a lightning storm avoid lone trees, cliff edges, and high ridges. Return to your vehicle if possible.
- Be careful near cliff edges, especially when rock is wet or icy.